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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 00388

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000388

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2015
TAGS: [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: LOW REGISTRATION TURNOUT FOR IRAQI OCV PROGRAM

REF: A) ABU DHABI 305 B) ABU DHABI 35 C) 04 ABU DHABI

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¶1. (C) Summary: While participant turnout significantly improved after the first disappointing day of Iraqi out-of-county voting (OCV) registration (ref. A), IOM officials are still questioning why so few UAE-based Iraqis are taking the opportunity to vote in the January 28-30 elections. Registration dates were extended to January 25, and polls extended their hours to remain open from 8 am to 7 pm, to lure more voters. While the extension did boost the final numbers, in the end just 12,581 Iraqi citizens registered to vote) 9,520 in Dubai and 3,061 in Abu Dhabi. Those involved in the election process agree that the primary reason for the low turnout is voter apathy, followed by security concerns by both voters and candidates, and the logistical and financial hardship incurred by voters who have to travel to the polling centers twice to register and vote. End summary.

REGISTRATION NUMBERS FAR BELOW IOM EXPECTATIONS

¶2. (C) Michael Burke, Head of the UAE's IOM OCV program, told Poloff that logistically the registration process was smooth and the support received from the UAEG was outstanding. However, he said that the polling centers &could use some more Iraqis.8 His initial registration goals were 30,000 for Dubai and 15,000 for Abu Dhabi, out of an estimated 60,000-100,000 Iraqi residents in the Gulf. Burke said the low turnout was due primarily to voter apathy. Most eligible voters didn't know the candidates and what the party platforms were, and they did not feel strongly for the small number of candidates for whom they did have some information. He said other Iraqis told him that they would stay away from the polls until the war was over and &occupation forces8 were out of Iraq. Burke also listed

the gap period between the registration and voting dates as financially and logistically prohibitive for voters traveling from outside the UAE. He believed the polls could have drawn 5,000 or more voters if same-day registration and voting was offered.

IRAQI POLITICAL ACTIVISTS NOT SURPRISED BY LOW NUMBERS

13. (C) The president of the Iraqi Businessmen's Council, Talib Khan, said that turnout was within the expatriate community's expectations. He estimated that approximately 35,000 UAE-based Iraqis were eligible to vote, and his group predicted that between 12,000-15,000 would register to vote. He opined that there would have been a much higher turnout if eligible voters would have been able to register and vote during one visit to the polling center. Khan said that most people could not afford to go to the center twice, either due to travel expenses or the time required away from their jobs. For example, he said that the Iraqi Ambassador to Bahrain would not vote because it would be too expensive to bring his family down to the UAE twice to register and vote, and it would be equally prohibitive to bridge the time gap by staying here in a hotel. If that was the case with an ambassador, Khan explained, imagine how difficult it would be for truck drivers or other laborers working in the Gulf to come to Dubai or Abu Dhabi twice to register and vote.

14. (C) Khan praised UAEG-provided security at the polling centers, and said that his compatriots were not concerned for their physical safety at the centers. However, he said that some were concerned that their names would end up on lists that might fall into the hands of those opposed to the elections. More importantly, because most parties were not disclosing the names of their candidates due to security concerns, potential voters did not know for whom they were voting. There was also little information available on the platforms of most of the 111 parties listed on the ticket, leading to further voter confusion. Khan said that this lack of information on political parties and candidates led to disinterest in participating in the voting process for many of his compatriots.

MEDIA BLAMES FEAR AND APATHY FOR KEEPING VOTERS AWAY

15. (U) Local newspapers interviewed poll workers and eligible voters who chose to stay away from the polls, to try to determine why voter turnout was so low. The reports named apathy as the primary reason why people weren't going to the polls, while others cited fear, a lack of adequate information about the candidates and party platforms, and little confidence in the polling process. IOM spokesperson Nicola Baldwin told a Gulf News reporter that most UAE-based Iraqi citizens were likely not boycotting the ballot. Rather, many long-term UAE residents simply did not care to vote. Other potential voters harbored fears of repercussions, despite assurances that the process was confidential and names would not be used for any other

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purposes. Some cited little confidence in the legitimacy of the process, stating that occupation forces would install candidates that suited them. Some said that they would not participate in elections so long as there is no security and stability in Iraq, and while occupation forces remained on Iraqi soil.

16. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
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